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Navy Assesses Damage to Secrets of Hunting Soviet Submarines

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The Soviet Union may have learned how the United States tracks its submarines in peacetime and would destroy them in war, U.S. Navy and intelligence officials said yesterday in discussing what they called deep concern about the Walker spy case.

Secret information allegedly passed to the Soviets by John Anthony Walker Jr.; his son, Michael, and John Walker's brother, Arthur, and unnamed others in a spying operation could be damaging enough to force the superpowers to change tactics in the silent struggle under the seas, sources said.

The Navy is assessing the damage and has not reached a conclusion about it, Navy officials said.

Navy Secretary John F. Lehman Jr. was among those waiting at the Defense Department yesterday for a briefing on what material the Soviets are thought to have received and what countermeasures might be necessary, Navy officials said.

Navy officials, while distressed about what information may have been compromised, said none of the Walkers had the array of special clearances needed to gain access to information about supersensitive U.S. antisubmarine warfare, the "black" programs.

But even less sensitive material already thought to have been given to the Soviets by the Walkers, they said, might reveal the

pattern and scale of U.S. antisubmarine operations.

"Sources and methods, that's what we have to worry about right now," an intelligence official said, referring to secret techniques developed in the last 20 years to locate every submerged Soviet submarine.

These range from sensitive microphones on the ocean floor to hunter submarines concealed outside Soviet ports to eavesdropping satellites.

The United States and the Soviet Union have been playing a cat-and-mouse game under the sea for more than two decades. It is deadlier than ever because each nation is using a growing proportion of its nuclear firepower on submarines.

Last month, at what he thought was an off-the-record seminar at Harvard's Center for International Studies, Lehman said that, under certain scenarios, the United States would attack Soviet missile submarines almost immediately in a war.

The hair-trigger usually associated with land-based missiles thought vulnerable to enemy missiles if not launched quickly will soon be true of sea-based missiles because they are becoming accurate enough to hit enemy missile silos in a surprise "first strike," according to arms control specialists.

If the Soviets learned from the secret papers how the United States detects, locates and "prosecutes the target" with a combination of sensors, submarines, ships, aircraft and satellites, they could concentrate on ways to combat it, several intelligence officials said.

"Until now," one former missile submarine skipper said of the Soviets, "they have been studying the shards. Now they may see the shape of the whole pot. That's bad."

Navy submarine and intelligence officers said they are less worried about what the Soviets may have gotten from Walker, 22, a Navy seaman recently returned to the United States from the aircraft carrier USS

Nimitz, than what they may have received from his father.

John Walker retired as a warrant officer after a 21-year naval career, including handling top-secret coded communications on the nuclear missile submarine Simon Bolivar from 1965 to 1967 and reading top-secret communications in and out of Atlantic surface-fleet headquarters at Norfolk from 1975 to 1976, his last Navy job.

After finishing boot camp, Seaman Walker was assigned in April 1983 to Navy

Fighter Squadron 102 in Oceana, Va., where he worked as a yeoman until January 1984 when he went to the Nimitz.

Navy officials said secret material from Oceana and the Nimitz to which Walker would have had access would be mostly about daily operations and tactics, not the tightly compartmentalized information about undersea operations and satellite surveillance.

John Walker, they said, would have been in a better position to gather such potentially damaging information from his jobs and from others who the Justice Department has said were engaged in espionage.

"If the Soviets sent a submarine into the Mediterranean and felt sure it had not been detected and learned from one of the secret papers obtained from Walker that their sub was detected at a certain time, they could reason backwards," an intelligence official said. "They might know a radio transmission was made at that time, revealing we had an intercept capability they did not know existed."

Any reports covering years of U.S. submarine operations, another intelligence official said, might reveal a pattern even though each patrol was different.

The Soviets most likely would run all of the operations through computers to produce a profile of how the United States thinks when it comes to deploying forces, he said, enabling them to anticipate where U.S. subs are most likely to be at a given time.

"We don't operate everywhere," one senior Navy officer said, adding that any tipoff to the Soviets about where missile-carrying submarines operate would be damaging. Both attack and missile submarines must rise near the surface at specific places to communicate with shore through aircraft or satellites.

Another source expressed concern that what the Walkers are suspected of transmitting may show the Soviets how to evade the network of sound surveillance system (SOSUS) underwater microphones on the continental shelf off the U.S. East and West coasts. These listening devices triangulate sound from a passing submarine and pinpoint its location.

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F.J. Schiavi, a senior vice president of VSE, described the Alexandria-based company as an engineering firm of 1,700 employees that does substantial work for the Navy and other military agencies.

Ron Howell, engineering site manager for VSE's branch in Chesapeake, said Walker had been employed there for more than five years. He said he was hired on the basis "of his military experience" and seemed like "a pleasant nice fellow, Mr. Average. Just like your next door neighbor."

He said Walker's job was to develop plans for the repair of Navy ships in the section devoted to "am-

phibious planning and engineering repair and analysis."

Howell said he couldn't conceive of any information that Walker would have had access to through his job that would be of interest to the Soviets.

"There's nothing he could get out of the firm that he couldn't get in the public library," Howell said.

Thomas J. Scarfato, who said he had lived two doors away from Walker for 15 years, described him as "a very nice fellow, outstanding, and I'm being sincere about it. I'm very, very surprised."

He said Walker was always offering gardening tips and frequently helped him with various mechanical problems with his car and the electrical pump on his swimming pool. "If I wasn't quite sure, he would drop everything and come right over," he said. "An ideal neighbor."

In arguing that Michael Walker should be held without bond, Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael Schatzow disclosed that Walker had allegedly taken "stacks of classified documents" to his father John on 10 occasions.

He said the documents weighed a total of 20 pounds, and that another 15 pounds of classified material was found near Walker's bunk on the Nimitz.

Schatzow said that while Michael Walker was working in a clerical position at a fighter squadron at the Oceana Naval Air Station in Virginia Beach, where he was assigned beginning in April 1983, he mentioned to his father that he had seen some classified documents.

John Walker told his son that "he could make some money" if he brought the document to him, Schatzow said.

"He thereafter took a number of documents to his father," and later, in about March 1984, John Walker paid his son \$1,000 in return for the information, he said.

State Corporation Commission records list Arthur Walker as secretary and treasurer of two of his brother's private detective and "debugging" companies, Confidential Reports Inc. and Associated Agents Inc. Both operate from a suite in a Virginia Beach office building.

But Laurie Robinson, part owner of Confidential Reports, said the records are at least partly incorrect. She said she was vice president, secretary and treasurer of Confidential Reports, and Arthur Walker was only employed as an investigator. "He is not a corporate officer in any way, shape or form."

She said he had worked for the firm for almost four years.

Arthur and John Walker formerly were partners in a Virginia Beach electronics business called Walker Enterprises.

After receiving submarine training, Arthur Walker served aboard a number of submarines, rising to the rank of lieutenant commander.

From 1968 on, he was assigned to the Atlantic Fleet Tactical School as an antisubmarine warfare instructor, according to his Navy biographical sheet.

Married to the former Rita Clare Fritsch, Walker has three children, Andrea Jay, 28, Eric Paul, 26, and Curt Christopher, 23.

Staff writer Sharon LaFraniere contributed to this report.